

Tiny recorder packs in features

One line of microcassette recorders, the Olympus Pearlcoders, has consistently set the standard for features and compactness. Now a new model pushes the standard even higher.

The Pearlcoder L200 from Olympus Corp., Crossways Park, Woodbury, N.Y. 11797, is more compact at 4.2 inches by 2 inches by 0.5 inches, and lighter — only 4.4 ounces with batteries — than any dictating machine I've seen. It's roughly the size of a Hershey candy bar.

Despite its shrunken size, it bristles with buttons, switches and features. With one exception, this downsizing has produced a better recorder.

The Pearlcoder L200 uses standard microcassettes. Depending on the type of tape used and speed selected, total recording time can vary from one to three hours.



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The Pearlcoder L200 offers all the standard features in a cassette recorder: tape transport functions, playback volume, internal speaker, earphone jack, built-in microphone and two-speed selector. However, the L200 also packs in these additional features:

■ **Variable Control Voice Actuator.** This handy feature uses sound to trigger the recording mode on or off. Using VCVA you can do hands off dictation or eliminate "dead spots" when recording meetings or interviews.

■ **Fast Play.** You can save time by playing back recorded material

30 percent faster than normal. Surprisingly, speech remains intelligible, though higher pitched, during the faster playback.

Using this feature, you can lop 20 minutes off listening to an hour tape.

■ **Cue Mark.** This feature, also called "automatic program selection signal," puts electronic "book marks" on a tape.

If you cue-marked every letter you dictated, it would be easy to zip back and forth from one letter to the next. You can also use the cue mark to "underline" important points in a meeting or interview.

On the downside, I was disturbed by the difference in playback quality between the L200 and my older, slightly heftier, L240E. The L200 sounded tinier and less natural by comparison.

The problem is that the overall downsizing also reduced speaker

size. Playing the same L200 tape in the larger machine, however, brought back the fuller sound.

But most Pearlcoder users don't concern themselves with playback. Typically the contents of a tape are transcribed from a playback unit with headphones and foot-operated controls.

Another drawback is its high list price, \$249. Most competing machines list for \$100 less.

■ **The bottom line.** The Pearlcoder L200 is a delightful machine to use. Despite its high retail price, it's available from many discounters for less than \$249. So, it pays to shop around. It's also addictive — like a Hershey candy bar.

Hillel Segal's column evaluates gadgets, seminars and books designed to enhance business productivity. Segal is a management consultant based in Boulder.